

California State Journal of Medicine.

Owned and Published Monthly by the
Medical Society of the State of California

PHILIP MILLS JONES, M. D., Secretary and Editor
PUBLICATION COMMITTEE.

Langley Porter, M.D.
Martin Fischer, M.D.

John Spencer, M.D.
Harry M. Sherman, M.D.

ADDRESS ALL COMMUNICATIONS

Secretary State Society, - - - 2210 Jackson Street,
State Journal, - - - San Francisco.
Official Register, - - -

Telephone, West 5975.

IMPORTANT NOTICE!

All Scientific Papers submitted for Publication must be
Typewritten.

Notify the office promptly of any change of address, in
order that mailing list and addresses in the Register may
be corrected.

VOL. V

NOV., 1907.

No. 11

EDITORIAL NOTES.

In Los Angeles, in San Jose, in Stockton, in Sacramento, as well as in San Francisco, there have been meetings of the local medical societies where the subject of plague was discussed. That is eminently well. There is just one way, and one only, of determining whether or not plague exists in any place; and that is by a careful inspection of all dead persons over a period of months. And this inspection must be made by one who knows. We know that plague, in the early years of an epidemic, is a very insignificant thing, so far as the number of cases is concerned. We also know that it is not difficult to eradicate, in these early years, *if we know that it exists*. How long did it exist in San Francisco before it was recognized? Nobody knows, for its discovery was almost, if not quite, accidental and it was some time before any systematic examination of the dead was enforced. We all know the history of that former epidemic; the shameful history of denial and concealment and the near approach to "shotgun quarantine." This JOURNAL, in its second number, December, 1902, in discussing this matter, said:

"The medical profession regards the subject of such vital importance to the whole country that it should be thoroughly investigated and given all the publicity possible. If there is danger of the plague spreading, it becomes the duty of medical men to warn the public and to do all in their power to stamp out the disease upon its first appearance, and not wait until it obtains a foothold and becomes too strong to cope with."

Because that was printed five years ago makes it no less true to-day. We should know, and know at once, just where the pest infection may have spread during these past years. Recently Oakland has taken up the work of inspection of the dead; and some cases have been found. Alameda and Berkeley will probably do the same thing, when they wake up. We would most respectfully but firmly urge upon Los Angeles, Sacramento, Stockton and other places to begin the same good work. There are other and smaller communities where the work is no less important, and where the expense can not be borne by the local community, it should be the duty of the state to see that the investigation is made and made properly. We can not afford *not to know* whether we are clean or not, and there is but one thing that is absolutely assured—*we do not know* whether we *are* clean or not. Let us waste no time about finding it out.

Shall we undertake to find out the extent of our infection voluntarily, or shall we wait till we are forced to do it? That is the only matter of choice, for it must be done, sooner or later. A recent news dispatch states that Seattle

has turned itself over to the supervision of the Public Health and Marine Hospital Service for the reason that cases of plague had been found in that community. There doubtless have been cases there for some time, but no careful inspection of the dead was enforced and consequently the infection has been only recently discovered. It might have been expected, for any seaport to which comes Oriental shipping—and rats—is at any time liable to infection. The Norway rat is the greatest traveler on the face of the earth; and the Norway rat has been carrying plague from country to country for a good many generations. Lloyd, in his masterly paper published in this JOURNAL, April, May and June, 1904, has given a perfect indictment of the rat; indeed we may, with a certain amount of safety, assume that plague is a disease of rats to which man, and probably some of the domestic animals, are susceptible. For years it exists in an apathetic state. In London, from 1616 to 1625 there were but a few cases annually, but in the last mentioned year the terrible devastation occurred and something like 37,000 deaths were recorded. It was nine years incubating in the city, and then—. Where pest-rats have gone, there they have carried the plague. But where have they gone? Who can say where, in our own State, for instance, they have gone and how far from the port of entry they have migrated, taking with them their mild form of plague infection? No one, for no one knows. And there is the one place where lies danger; *what we do not know*. Let us, by all means, waste no valuable time in finding out just how far this insidious infection has gone, and then let us get rid of it—as we very well can do. Two things alone are certain; where there are plague-infected rats or squirrels, there will occur occasional cases of plague in man; and where there are cases originat-